

“Homer Undone”: Homeric Scholarship and the Invention of Female Epic

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In an important article written in 1986—one of the first to seriously and critically address female epic as a genre and the “anxiety of authorship” that surrounds it—Susan Stanford Friedman noted that “epic... has continued to invoke the inscriptions of gender implicit in Homer... as father of [the] discourse” (Friedman 1986: 203). Epic’s traditional focus on men and the deeds of men on the pattern of Homer, on race/nation formation (and hence ‘fatherhood’), and its circulation through male patterns of literary production (male bard to male audience) from Homer until at least the seventeenth century, have created a cultural association between Homeric epic, epic genre, and (western norms of) masculinity (Friedman 1986: 205).¹ Female epics—that is, epics written by women writers—have similarly interacted with Homer (and the criticism that surrounds him) as the foundational figure of the genre.² In this chapter I want to take the encoding of genre and gender norms around Homer in the history of epic, to look at how the development of female epic responds to and interplays with Homeric scholarship and the literary criticism of epic.³

Focusing on two major and influential texts in the history of the formation of female epic—Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* (1856) and H.D.’s *Helen in Egypt* (1961)⁴—I suggest that each female epicist is deliberately interacting with, and defining herself in counterpoint to, a different landmark point in the history of Homeric scholarship. In particular, I will propose that the often-noted generic flexibility of female epic derives specifically from the

authors' complex engagement with contemporary movements in Homeric scholarship.⁵ Female epic—crossing between female-gendered authorship and the expectations of a traditionally masculine genre; engaging with Homer and yet always (and consciously) *not* Homer—has, by its paradoxical self-definition as both female and epic, always been in conversation with classical scholarship and contemporary literary criticism, as a means to define and explore its place within the tradition. The anxiety experienced by female epic poets, then, I would argue, is not merely anxiety of influence, authorship, or, as Friedman suggests, “anxiety of genre,” but rather, a potent mix of all three: a combined awareness of the constraints of female-gendered authorship, the male-gendering of epic genre, and, crucially, the weight of the influence and critical reception of Homer.⁶

I. “That Wolff, those Platos”: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Friedrich August Wolf’s *Prolegomena ad Homerum*⁷

In this section, I want to examine *Aurora Leigh* to show how Barrett Browning is exploring debates in Homeric scholarship—in particular, the controversy sparked by Friedrich August Wolf’s 1795 *Prolegomena ad Homerum*, and his argument for a new vision for the composition and transmission of the Homeric poems—in order to define and understand her own position as a (female) author of epic poetry, and to bolster the generic definition of *Aurora Leigh* as an epic, which is a central focus of much of the metaliterary commentary in book 5.⁸ Focusing on a passage in *Aurora Leigh* in which Aurora prominently discards her copy of Wolf’s *Prolegomena*, I will suggest that Barrett Browning engages with Homeric scholarship to examine her own status as a woman and an epic poet, and to redefine the generic expectations surrounding female

epic. In this way, I will suggest, it is possible to trace a fluid, dynamic and productive relationship between movements in Homeric scholarship, female epic poetry, and literary criticism surrounding epic.⁹

1.1 Barrett Browning and the Classics

Bailey (2006: 118) points out that *Aurora Leigh* can be read along the lines of a *Künstlerroman*, “that sub-genre of the bildungsroman which traces the life and growth of an artist.”¹⁰ Aurora Leigh—the title character—undergoes a transformative process as a woman poet, attempting to understand her place in the world as a woman and an author, and to reconcile her poetic calling with her romantic attachment to Romney Leigh. Whilst to suggest that Aurora is a direct analogue for Elizabeth Barrett Browning herself would be facile, there are certain elements of the exploration of female identity, authorship, and the opposition between poetry/individuality and duty/relationship within the epic which bear witness to Barrett Browning’s development of her ideas around what it means to identify as a woman and an author.¹¹ Barrett Browning certainly engaged with classical models in her attempt to define female epic, and her own position as a female epicist.¹² Her first epic, written at the age of only eleven, was a retelling of the Battle of Marathon and written explicitly in the tradition of Alexander Pope’s 1715–1720 translation of Homer’s *Iliad*: as Barrett Browning later wrote, “the Greeks were my demi-gods, and haunted me out of Pope’s Homer ... and thus my great ‘epic’ is simply Pope’s Homer done over again, or undone” (Barrett Browning 1877: 159).¹³ She had a thorough classical background, read Latin and Greek fluently and published translations of classical texts including two translations of Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* in 1833 and 1845–50.¹⁴ In a particularly

evocative image in one of her letters to Robert Browning, discussing her seclusion and its disadvantages and benefits for her development as a poet, she describes herself as “in a manner, as a *blind poet*” (Kintner 1969: vol. 1: 41, original emphasis).¹⁵ Of course, the original blind poet was Homer himself, in a tradition that stretches back to the archaic *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*.¹⁶ Barrett Browning thus connects herself directly, in the first person, to Homer—using the generic masculine “poet” to neatly blur the gender gap between them. In another essay, probably written around 1820, Barrett Browning describes a child called “Beth”—clearly intended as an analogue for her younger self—who “was a poet herself ... No woman was ever before such a poet as she w[oul]d be. As Homer was among men, so w[oul]d she be among women—she would be the feminine of Homer...” (Browning 1913: 293).

1.2 Discarding Wolf: Aurora Leigh 5.1246–57

The most striking example of Barrett Browning’s engagement with Homeric scholarship, however, appears in her poetry.¹⁷ Towards the end of the fifth book of *Aurora Leigh*, which forms a digression on the proper subject and form of epic, Aurora is found as an established poet in London, but low on funds and in poor health. Desiring to travel to Italy and in need of the money to fund her travel, she contemplates selling her father’s books. Unable to bear the thought of parting with her father’s copy of Proclus, she turns instead to Wolf’s *Prolegomena*:

The kissing Judas, Wolff [sic], shall go instead,
Who builds us such a royal book as this
To honour a chief poet, folio-built,

And writes above, ‘The house of Nobody!’
Who floats in cream, as rich as any sucked
From Juno’s breasts, the broad Homeric lines,
And, while with their spondaic prodigious mouths
They lap the lucent margins as babe-gods,
Proclaims them bastards. Wolff’s [sic] an atheist;
And if the Iliad fell out, as he says,
By mere fortuitous concourse of old songs,
Conclude as much too for the universe.

AL 5.1246–1257¹⁸

This is not a mere side-note or auxiliary to Aurora’s upcoming journey. I want to suggest that Aurora’s deliberate and impassioned discarding of Wolf, with its engagement with Wolf’s scholarship on Homer and the epic author’s identity—turning “a chief poet” into a “Nobody”—has important implications for Barrett Browning’s understanding of her own epic authorship. First and foremost, it is crucial to note that it is not *Homer* which Aurora discards here—as Simon Dentith and Downes both suggest¹⁹—but a particular critical reading of Homer with which she disagrees.

The *Prolegomena ad Homerum* was one of the landmark works of Homeric scholarship at the turn of the nineteenth century and introduced a debate which would characterize Homeric scholarship for hundreds of years.²⁰ In brief, Wolf’s major claim in the *Prolegomena* was for a new “textual history” for the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—a tracing of the origins, formation and transmission history of the Homeric epics.²¹ Inconsistencies in the different textual traditions and

variants in the commentaries of the scholia were taken as evidence that the Homeric epics were a) composed orally, before the advent of writing; b) not composed by a single author (and therefore not all by “Homer”); and c) formed of a collection of shorter poems, preserved by an oral tradition and later collected and edited into its present form. This collation, Wolf claimed, was initially performed by Pisistratus, the sixth-century BCE tyrant of Athens, and was subsequently heavily edited by the scholars of Alexandria, whose annotations and comments were preserved and published a few years earlier by J. B. G. d’Ansse de Villoison in his 1788 edition of the Venetus A and B manuscripts of Homer’s *Iliad*.²²

Anthony Grafton argues persuasively that Wolf’s propositions were hardly new—commentators as far back as Cicero had implied that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were orally composed and collated later by Pisistratus.²³ What *was* new was the fluency and cogency of Wolf’s argument; his imaginative creativity in positing a history for the Homeric texts; and the extent of the impact of the *Prolegomena*, which “for almost a century thereafter... was *the* book that any aspiring classicist had to master” (Grafton, Most & Zetzel 1985: 26).²⁴ By 1874, seventeen years after the publication of *Aurora Leigh*, the responses to Wolf’s *Prolegomena* were so many and so diverse that Richard Volkmann was able to produce an entire volume devoted to its history and criticism (Volkmann 1874). Its reception was just as vigorous in England as in Germany. Diane Josefowicz (2016) traces the movement in classical scholarship from Richard Porson’s (Wolf-influenced) contributions to the 1801 Grenville Homer, a new critical edition of Homer, to Mark Pattison’s 1865 essay on Wolf which ensured Wolf’s place as “a Victorian intellectual touchstone” (Josefowicz 2016: 821).²⁵ Pattison’s essay, couched as a review of J. F. J. Arnoldt’s 1861–2 analysis of Wolf’s pedagogical beliefs, introduces Wolf’s *Prolegomena* as already

“famous,” and “known to us in this country... in connection with a certain theory of the origin of the Homeric poems” (Pattison 1889: 337).

The rejection in *Aurora Leigh* of Wolf’s philological and historicist model—where ancient oral poems were seen as modulated, adjusted and curated by their tradition—allows Barrett Browning to postulate instead a personal vision of epic authorship. Through her rejection of Wolf’s Homeric scholarship, Barrett Browning’s epic poet becomes an individual named poet (i.e. not “Nobody”), whose work is both transcendent of its tradition (as opposed to “folio-built”) and divinely inspired (Homer’s lines become “babe-gods,” as opposed to Wolf who is dubbed “an atheist”). These epic characteristics are mirrored in the text of *Aurora Leigh* in several different ways. In terms of the individual named poet, the conflation of Aurora’s identity with the title of the work—she is its eponymous heroine—foregrounds Aurora’s name and poetic identity from the very beginning. Others have already noted Aurora’s identity as “epic bard” and “prophet-poet” along the lines of the Homeric bard;²⁶ according to Bailey (2006: 122), “her sense of authorship as a high calling partakes of both epic-bardic and Romantic-bardic paradigms.” Several times in *Aurora Leigh* Aurora refers to poetry as “singing” and herself as a “singer,” suggesting that she is engaging with a Homeric model of oral authorship, as for example at 4.1202 where Romney Leigh tells Aurora to “sing your songs.” In terms of transcendence of tradition, there is a telling moment just before Aurora rejects Wolf’s *Prolegomena*, in which she discards some other books:

I fear that I must sell this residue
Of my father’s books, although the Elzevirs
Have fly-leaves overwritten by his hand

In faded notes as thick and fine and brown
As cobwebs on a tawny monument
Of the old Greeks—*conferenda haec cum his*—
Corruptè citat—lege potius,
And so on in the scholar's regal way
Of giving judgment on the parts of speech...

... Ay, but books and notes

Must go together.

AL 5.1217–1228

Coming only eighteen lines before Aurora's discarding of Wolf, and as the first books to be disposed of, these are both worthy of further examination and, I would suggest, are deeply implicated in the subsequent rejection of Wolf's *Prolegomena*. First of all, the labelling of her father's books as "Elzevirs" is significant: it identifies them as products of a celebrated Dutch publishing house of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, whose most significant volumes included two editions of the New Testament in Greek (1624 and 1633) and, importantly, a 1656 edition of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.²⁷ Whether Aurora's Elzevirs are biblical or classical—and as we shall see later, the blurring of these two categories here is not without significance—the essential point is that their pedigree points them out as a specific edition in the transmission history of an ancient text. Both the Elzevir New Testaments and the Elzevir Homer were revised, edited and translated versions of the 'original' ancient texts written in Greek: the Elzevir Homer, for example, was edited and translated by the Dutch classical scholar Cornelis

Schrevel,²⁸ and included the Greek scholia (commentary) of Pseudo-Didymus, that is, the body of scholia traditionally (and erroneously) associated with the first-century BCE scholiast and grammarian Didymus.²⁹

Further than this, Barrett Browning describes the text as being “overwritten” with her father’s “faded notes”: but the examples she gives us of the types of notes written show that they are far more than simply summaries. *Conferenda haec cum his* can be translated as “this is to be compared with that”; *corruptè citat* as “falsely cited;” and *lege potius* as “read rather...” These Latin phrases are highly marked, in that they are precisely those which classical scholars, commentators and editors of the Homeric texts commonly use; indeed, they are directly compared to “cobwebs on a tawny monument / Of the old Greeks,” emphasizing their classical pedigree. What these notes tell us, then—and supported by the later description of them as written “in the scholar’s regal way”—is that Aurora’s books are in fact ancient texts, reprinted and edited in the seventeenth century, and then annotated with contemporary scholarship. It is for this reason that “books and notes / Must go together”—for what they represent is precisely that process of textual transmission, and the reduction of the poem to a “folio-built” scholarly tradition and commentary, which Wolf supported and which Aurora denies.

1.3 “*The two fires of the Scriptures and Homer*”

The blurring of this textual tradition as belonging to the Homeric texts or the Greek New Testament in the naming of her father’s books as merely “Elzevirs” is, as I have noted above, no accident. The oscillation between biblical and classical imagery—“the two fires of the Scriptures and Homer,” as Barrett Browning puts it in one of her letters (Barrett Browning 1899: 92)—is a

key and often-noted element of Barrett Browning's writing.³⁰ Kerry McSweeney goes so far as to argue that "the Bible [is]... far and away the most important literary influence" on *Aurora Leigh* (Barrett Browning 1993: xxxiii), whilst Friedman suggests that "[Barrett Browning's] reputation as the best woman poet in Britain was based on a succession of experiments in a variety of genres associated with masculine authority," from Greek tragedy to the New Testament, Homer to Milton (Friedman 1986: 207–8).³¹ In the Wolf passage in *Aurora Leigh*, the classical and the biblical are explicitly connected and interwoven through imagery. Wolf is called a "kissing Judas" and then an "atheist"; Homer's lines of poetry are called "babe-gods," and the white margins of the text are compared to the milk "from Juno's breasts."

Yet there is more than simply imagery at play here. Grafton notes in the introduction to Wolf's *Prolegomena* that it "was directly modeled on one of the most controversial products of German biblical scholarship of Wolf's time: J. G. Eichhorn's *Einleitung ins Alte Testament*" (Grafton, Most & Zetzel 1985: 20).³² He goes on to summarize the similarities between Eichhorn's work and that of Wolf, fifteen or so years later:

Like Wolf, Eichhorn treated his text as a historical and an anthropological document, the much-altered remnant of an early stage in the development of human culture. Like Wolf, he held that the original work had undergone radical changes, so that the serious Biblical scholar must reconstruct "the history of the text."

Wolf's approach, then, is one of "atheism" because it espouses a similarly historicist attitude to contemporary biblical scholars; and "the Elzevirs" mentioned earlier at line 1218 are to be

discarded, whether classical or biblical, because of the similarities of “the scholar’s regal way / Of giving judgment on the parts of speech” in *both*.³³

1.4 Curating Homer: Proclus, Plato and Wolf

That this is a carefully curated model of classical and contemporary scholarly and literary critical debates around Homer and Homeric authorship is shown, not only by Wolf’s *Prolegomena* and Aurora’s father’s Elzevirs, but also by the other books she chooses to discard. After disposing of her father’s scholarly biblical/classical annotations (5.1217–28), Aurora continues with Proclus (1228–45); but she decides that she “cannot, in such a beggared life, afford / To lose my Proclus—not for Florence even.” Wolf is discarded instead (1246–57); and the final victim is Plato (“That Wolff, those Platos: sweep the upper shelves / As clean as this, and so I am almost rich”). Even without Wolf, the choice of authors—Proclus kept, Plato discarded—is a blatant attempt to create a curated collection of Homeric criticism. Plato, of course, was one of the most famous early critics of Homer in his *Republic* (c.380 BCE), and argued for the banishment of poetry, and Homeric poetry above all, as a false imitation of reality.³⁴ Proclus, on the other hand, was a Neoplatonist philosopher of the fifth century CE, much less well known than Plato, among whose works were a set of commentaries on Plato, including a series of essays in response to the *Republic*.³⁵ The sixth essay, in particular, contains a defense of Homer against the charges brought against him by Socrates in the *Republic*: in it, Proclus attempts to rehabilitate Homer by claiming that *both* Plato and Homer should be regarded as “interpreters of the same truth about reality” (Lamberton 2012: 61).³⁶

In this sense, the decisions Aurora makes as to which books to keep and which to discard create a distinctly curated collection of classical texts and subsequent scholarship to create a particular vision of Homer as an author, and epic and its role. Plato, who banished Homer, is himself banished. Proclus, who defended Homer, is kept. Seventeenth-century editions printed by Elzevir, along with their accompanying notes symptomatic of the “folio-built” scholarship and tradition introduced in Wolf’s *Prolegomena*, are all discarded as contrary to the preferred vision of the individual poet-genius, divinely inspired, whose poetry is transcendent of context and textual tradition.

1.5 Bastards and babe-gods: Patrilineal epic and Homeric scholarship

At the same time, Aurora’s rejection of her *father’s* Elzevirs—representing the philological biblical and classical tradition of scholarship and covered in scholia-like annotations—suggests a dismissal of a patrilineal tradition of masculine epic and scholarly commentary. Barrett Browning thus, through a complicated engagement with, and refutation of, contemporary scholarship on epic as a genre, prides Homer—whom she calls the “father of poetry”³⁷—from the patrilineal mechanisms of textual reception and commentary.³⁸ Instead, as other critics have noted, she places Homer within a maternal vision of epic poetry, refiguring the Homeric lines as “babes,” and the white margins of the page as “breast-milk.”³⁹ Here the ‘natural’ image of poetry as an infant feeding on a mother’s breastmilk is intruded upon by the ‘cultural’ notion of hereditary legitimacy between a father and his children, as the male Wolf disowns Homeric poetry as a bastard.⁴⁰ Homer’s epics, visualized through the maternal succession from Homer to his “babe-gods,” are displaced by Wolf’s rejection of the Homeric lines, “proclaim[ing] them

bastards”—and then displaced once again, as Aurora in turn rejects Wolf. Wolf’s analytical vision of Homer, and the associations evoked by her father’s scholarly editions of the Homeric text, are thus both discarded, to be replaced by a new vision of female epic poetry: one which rests on a transcendent vision of the classical tradition, freed from the masculine constraints of her father’s and Wolf’s scholarship and false fatherhood, and which instead projects a new type of creative, divinely inspired authorship, visualized through the image of the maternal.⁴¹

II. “Things remembered, forgotten, and re-assembled in different order”: H.D. and the oral-formulaic theory of Milman Parry

Hilda Doolittle, known by her pen name H.D., was born in 1886 in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and later became part of a circle of American modernist poets who would shape the discourse of early-twentieth-century American poetry, including William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, and, perhaps most notably, the poet and literary critic Ezra Pound.⁴²

Helen in Egypt was written between 1952 and 1955, and published posthumously in 1961.⁴³ It was one of H.D.’s latest works in a wide-ranging corpus notable for its classical allusions, displaying a vast wealth of intertextuality with authors from Apollonius of Rhodes to Euripides, Homer to Theophrastus.⁴⁴ The epic is divided into three sections, “Pallinode,” “Leuké” and “Eidolon,” which are in turn subdivided into seven, seven and six books, each of which contains eight lyric poems written in free verse, headed by prose captions.⁴⁵ Through the course of the poem we follow Helen, her meeting in Egypt with Achilles after his death, her explorations of her troubled past with Paris and Theseus, and ultimately, Helen and Achilles’

union in the re-habilitation of the mother-figure, represented as a union of the goddesses Cypris (Aphrodite), Thetis, and Isis—and of course, Helen herself.⁴⁶

Rather than focusing specifically on moments of classical intertextuality—although these will come into my discussion—I want to suggest that H.D., like Barrett Browning, constructed her epic in dialogue with contemporary issues in classical scholarship.⁴⁷ I will argue that seeing *Helen in Egypt* through the lens of contemporary critical movements in the study of Homeric epic—in particular, the oral-formulaic theory of Milman Parry—provides a new perspective on the poem’s major themes; and that reading *Helen in Egypt* in counterpoint to Parry’s research on Homeric orality sheds light on H.D.’s wider project, and her re-definition of female epic. In contrast to Barrett Browning, however—and typically for the Imagist poet—this engagement is much more oblique. As Flack (2015: 10) points out, we cannot expect “the scholarly precision” which is often assumed in studies of H.D.’s classical allusions: she, and other modernist poets like her, “were more concerned with how readers might manage partial, incomplete, and failing knowledge than they were in creating assured pedantic readers.” Perhaps we might imagine that it is in that, as much as anything, that the “improvisatory, unsystematic nature of modernist Homeric writing” reflects the oral theories of Milman Parry—where bards are seen as improvising on an already-known theme.

2.1 Milman Parry and the oral-formulaic theory

One of the landmark points of early-twentieth-century Homeric scholarship was the comparative oral research undertaken by Milman Parry in the 1920’s and early 1930’s.⁴⁸ Parry, an assistant professor of ancient Greek at Harvard, performed comparative research in Yugoslavia to

establish whether any evidence could be found for the feasibility of the memorization and composition of oral poetry at similar lengths to Homer. His major contribution was in his analysis of the formulaic structure of Homeric epic, with a particular focus on its epithets (such as Homer's "wine-dark sea"), which he argued were directly associated with its oral composition (Parry 1971). Parry's theories, further developed by his student Albert Lord, suggested a specific mechanism for the composition of oral epic: the memorization of small elements of poetry, such as formulae (including epithets) or stock scenes, and then their re-organization in various patterns and configurations by different bards as the traditional stories were handed from one poet to another. These oral elements, which initially served a purely mnemonic function, were then preserved when the Homeric poems were transcribed into a written text.

Haubold (2007: 31) suggests in particular that his research on the orality of Homeric epic radically altered "discourses of tradition and reception precisely in the context of shifting, and often conflicting, perceptions of Homeric epic as a text." Discussing the effect Parry's work had on twentieth-century creative receptions of Homer, Haubold writes (2007: 44):

A linear model of literary reception, where elements of Homeric epic are creatively imitated and adapted, is called into question by the competing and overlapping notions of the timeless text. Some [twentieth-century authors] knew Parry's theory in detail and engaged with it in sophisticated and sometimes disconcerting ways. Many did not, but even when we assume no direct knowledge, twentieth-century responses to Homer often resonate with Parry's concerns.

This “resonance” with movements in Homeric scholarship and the major shift in the visualization of the Homeric text introduced by Parry is an important tool in reading H.D.’s *Helen in Egypt*. Most scholars interested in the classical intertext of the poem have focused on the opening prose caption to “Pallinode” (Doolittle 1961: 1),⁴⁹ where H.D. traces the textual history of Helen’s story, from the archaic lyricist Stesichorus’ *Palinode* (in which Stesichorus famously defends Helen against the accusation that she went to Troy) to Euripides’ *Helen* (412 BCE, which tells the story of Helen’s discovery by Menelaus in Egypt after the Trojan War):⁵⁰

*We all know the story of Helen of Troy but few of us have followed her to Egypt.
How did she get there? Stesichorus of Sicily in his Pallinode [sic], was the first
to tell us. Some centuries later, Euripides repeats the story.*

This opening—as well as references in the text to Euripidean tragedy and comments in H.D.’s working notebook—has led Eileen Gregory to argue in her 1995 article (and later in her 1997 book, *H.D. and Hellenism*), that “the major subtext of *Helen in Egypt* is not Homeric epic... but rather Euripidean tragedy” (Gregory 1995: 84).⁵¹ I want to argue, however, that this is to miss the fundamental force of the phrase “we all know the story” with which the epic opens. That Homer is elided here as the origin of the story of Helen of Troy is, I want to suggest, part of both the latent power of the Homeric texts in their formation of the classical tradition⁵²—so well-known that they do not even need to be referenced by name—as well as, and more importantly, an evocation of the tension between the source text and “the story,” the narrative, the myth which is handed down through the vagaries of the textual tradition from Stesichorus to Euripides to H.D.’s own poem, “*the later, little understood Helen in Egypt*” (p.1, original emphasis).

In what follows, then, I will argue that the subtext to *Helen in Egypt* is not Euripidean tragedy (as Gregory posits)—but neither is it Homeric epic per se, or at least, not its *content* (as many major critics like Blau DuPlessis 1986: 111–12 have suggested).⁵³ Rather, I will suggest, the major focus is on the *textual* level, in response to Parry’s oral theory: the tension between orality and textuality, and the fragile materiality of the Homeric texts which opens up the problem of the ‘reality’ of Helen’s story, and the slippage between her oral and textual recreations—from the oral Homeric songs, to the written Homeric texts, to the lyric of Stesichorus and the spoken/sung drama of Euripides.⁵⁴

H.D.’s interest in Homer and her engagement with classical literature and scholarship more generally have been much studied, most notably by Gregory in *H.D. and Hellenism*, but also by Flack in *Modernism and Homer*, who suggests that H.D. worked most closely to the classical tradition of all the modernist poets (Flack 2015: 165).⁵⁵ As Gregory (1997: 173) notes, “the specificity of [her] references to Homer indicates that H.D. had a good acquaintance with both his epics in her early years”;⁵⁶ though she did not know much Greek (at least not formally), she composed free translations of the first hundred lines of the *Odyssey*, as well as Euripides’ *Ion*, *Iphigeneia in Aulis* and *Hippolytus*, consulting a combination of standard editions (with the help of a dictionary) and English and French translations.⁵⁷

It was not only the content of classical poetry which interested H.D., however, but classical scholarship too. Flack suggests the importance of J. A. K. Thomson’s readings of the *Odyssey* for H.D.’s interpretation of the *Odyssey*; Gregory analyzes her engagement with the literary critic Walter Pater and the Cambridge classicist, Jane Harrison; in an essay on Pausanias, H.D. refers to “the great German, Willamowitz-Müllendorf [sic],” founder of the modern discipline of classical philology; and we know that she read the work of classicists Arthur Verrall

and Gilbert Murray in her studies of Euripides.⁵⁸ While H.D. does not specifically mention the work of Milman Parry,⁵⁹ we can be fairly certain that she was at least aware of its ‘resonance’ within Homeric scholarship and reception: not least because her close friend, literary colleague and one-time fiancé, Ezra Pound, with whom she corresponded throughout her life,⁶⁰ certainly did know of Parry’s work.⁶¹

2.2 *Memory, recomposition and orality in ‘Helen in Egypt’*

The tension between oral memory and fixed script resonates throughout *Helen in Egypt*, and forms one of its central concerns amidst a host of other oppositions: Greece/Egypt; male/female; war/peace, epic/lyric, and so on.⁶² In perhaps one of the most telling passages, H.D. refers to the contrast between the tension of a drama-in-progress, “a story, a song,” where the story is open-ended (“how will the story end?”), and “the already-written drama or script,” where “drama” is visualized as textual production, a pre-written script in which “the players have no choice in the matter” (Doolittle 1961: 230):

*There is a story, a song ‘the harpers will sing forever.’ It is a play, a drama—
‘who set the scene? who lured the players?’ The players have no choice in the
matter of the already-written drama or script. They are supremely aware of the
honour that ‘all song forever’ has conferred upon them.*

This is, in the first instance, an example of the often-noted generic flexibility of *Helen in Egypt*, fusing drama, song (lyric) and epic with apparent ease.⁶³ And yet it is not simply about the fusion

of generic categories here, but also the combination and complication of the “already-written ... script” and the oral “song.” H.D., in other words, opens up the paradox of a *written oral poem*. That this paradox and tension between “song” and “script” is written through Homer is made evident by the fact that H.D. here paraphrases (in quotation) Helen’s words to Hector in the *Iliad*, “so that we, too, may be subjects of song for generations to come.”⁶⁴ And the contrast between the prose caption at the start of the poem, and its self-referential quotation of the poem beneath—“who set the scene? who lured the players?” (p. 231)—both plays out the history of Homeric scholarship and annotations/scholia, as we saw above, and draws attention to the opposition between the (contrasting) voices of the poet and/or scholar.⁶⁵

At this point in the poem the tension between orality/textuality, scholarship/poetry is as yet unresolved, “a question asked / to which there was no answer” (p. 230). But the opposition and tension reaches its climax at an important passage near the poem’s close, in which H.D. moves back to take a wide view of epic, its composition and proper subject. At this point, at the start of the last book of the final section, “Eidolon,” Helen has realized the nature of “the ultimate”—but also, the “price” at which that comes, in terms of the definition and circumscription of “the epic,” and the subjects which have been excluded from “the story” (pp. 288–89):

but what followed before, what after?

a thousand-thousand days,

as many mysterious nights,

and multiplied to infinity,

the million personal things,
things remembered, forgotten,

remembered again, assembled
and re-assembled in different order
as thoughts and emotions,

the sun and the seasons changed,
and as the flower-leaves that drift
from a tree were the numberless

tender kisses, the soft caresses,
given and received; none of these
came into the story,

it was epic, heroic and it was far
from a basket a child upset
and the spools that rolled to the floor...

This passage is significant, in that it is the first time that “epic” is mentioned specifically within the poem, suggesting its metaliterary significance as an examination of the genre. The classical intertexts of the passage are both overt and generically complicated. Towards the end of the excerpt quoted above, H.D. gives as an example of the “million personal things” excluded from

epic “the numberless / tender kisses,” which are described with a simile: “as the flower-leaves that drift / from a tree were the numberless / tender kisses” (p. 289). This is a clear reference to one of Homer’s most famous similes from *Iliad* 6.146–9, where the generations of mortals are compared to “the leaves which the wind scatters to the ground.”⁶⁶ Paradoxically, H.D. uses a Homeric simile to describe something which, she argues, has been deemed inappropriate to epic. At the same time, the subject of the simile—“the numberless / tender kisses”—are also a classical intertext, this time referring to the *carmina* of Catullus—a first-century BCE Roman poet who was part of a group of ‘new poets’ who had self-avowedly cast off the Homeric (Greek)/Ennian (Latin) epic model. Catullus’ poem 5, written in hendecasyllabics, famously requests from his lover Lesbia “a thousand kisses, then a hundred; / then another thousand, and another hundred;” “the sun may set and rise again; / but when once our brief light goes, / there is but a single night for sleeping;” therefore they will kiss and “confound the number, so we will not know... / how many are our kisses.”⁶⁷ Not only are the “numberless / tender kisses” in *Helen in Egypt* a clear reference to those of Catullus; the earlier passage in H.D.’s poem—“a thousand-thousand days, / as many mysterious nights, / and multiplied to infinity”—recalls the day/night contrast of the opening to Catullus 5, and the anaphora of “thousand... thousand” in the description of Lesbia’s kisses.

This is, then, a highly marked passage in terms of both its definition of epic as a genre, and its classical intertextuality. The generic blending of Homer and Catullus in the refutation of epic subject matter both aligns H.D.’s project with other poets who countered Homer—like Catullus—and, paradoxically, appropriates Homeric language in order to conduct its refutation. These moments of intertextuality set the stage for H.D.’s most important investigation of Homeric scholarship and the mechanism of the textual tradition. Flanked by the Catullan

“thousand-thousand days” and the Homeric simile of the “flower-leaves,” we have the central definition of the mechanism by which the subject matter that was deemed unfit for epic was elided: “the million personal things, / things remembered, forgotten, / remembered again, assembled / and re-assembled in different order” (p. 289).⁶⁸ On one level, this plays into the theme of memory which resonates throughout *Helen in Egypt*: a few pages after this passage, the entire poem closes with the line, “*a memory forgotten*” (p. 304, original emphasis), suggesting its centrality to the epic’s concerns. But on another level, the association between memory, re-composition and epic resonates particularly closely with Parry’s theory of oral composition in Homer. Parry’s discussion of the “technique” of epic oral poetry is similar in its wording (Parry 1971: 20, emphasis mine):

We are faced with the analysis of a technique which, because the bard knew it without being aware that he knew it, because it was dependent on his *memory* of an *infinite* number of details, was able to attain a degree of development which we shall never be in a position perfectly to understand.

The juxtaposition of “memory” with “an infinite number of details” seems to recall H.D.’s “things remembered,” “multiplied to infinity”—that nexus of surplus, memory and detailed recall which Parry outlines as the province of the oral bard. Similarly, Parry discusses formulaic epithets (Parry 1971: 82–3, emphasis mine):

Traces of originality remain, perhaps; but of an originality that does no more than *rearrange* the words and expressions of the tradition without important

modifications. The poet's greatest originality in the handling of epithets would have been to use some noun-epithet formulae a little more or a little less.

The re-arrangement in a different order of formulae that have been stored in the poet's memory, as the greatest expression of a poet's originality, seems to come close to *Helen in Egypt's* "things remembered, forgotten, / remembered again, assembled / and re-assembled in different order." In the union of *memory* and *re-assembly*—the two key facets of oral epic poetry as identified by Parry—in the passage that closes *Helen in Egypt*, then, we see a reflection or refraction of contemporary Homeric oral theory.

2.3 "What can a woman know?": H.D., William Carlos Williams and the gynogynetic text

The important point, however—and the ultimate paradox—is that these "things remembered, forgotten," which make up the texture of Homeric poetry according to Parry's oral theory, are in fact the very elements which H.D. says did *not* "come into the story" of epic. Just as a Homeric simile is paradoxically used to define the non-Homeric anti-"epic, heroic" subject matter, so a Homeric textual mechanism is used to describe the very process by which non-epic elements have been excluded from the epic tradition. But it is precisely the "unity" of this apparent paradox which is the ultimate aim, or *telos*, of the text. When Helen undergoes her 'psychoanalytic' sessions with Theseus, she comes out realizing that there is "no need to untangle the riddle, / it is very simple" (p. 192) ... "they were one" (p. 238).⁶⁹ As we approach the epic's end, the unity of opposites is stressed more than ever: Cypris (Aphrodite), Isis and Thetis are aligned (pp. 178–79); opposites like "day, night," "wrong, right," and "dark, light"

“meet finally in ‘Helen in Egypt’ and ‘Helen in Hellas forever’ ” (p. 190, original emphasis), unifying difference in the fractal figure of Helen; and ultimately, of course, Helen and Achilles, La Mort and L’Amour come together as one, as both their own parents and their children, enshrined in the child Euphorion (p. 288). Critics have read this realization of “the ultimate” and “the One” at the poem’s close as bringing together the various oppositions and polarities explored throughout the epic, as we saw above, breaking down the contrast between Greek and Egyptian, male and female, Achilles and Helen by “rewrit[ing] the maternal back into an epic tradition that has tended to repress it” (Flack 2015: 186).⁷⁰ The maternal, in the rehabilitation of Thetis, Achilles’ mother, as well as Helen’s newly realized motherhood, becomes the solution to the antitheses and false oppositions which represented both unreality and the violence of war.

The emphasis on the maternal as the epic’s solution is not, however, simply the union of male and female abstractions in the figures of Helen and Achilles, as most scholars suggest; it is, rather, a deliberate resolution between two modes of epic transmission, the male patrilineage of Homer, and the matrilineal epic of H.D.—contrasting visions of epic lineage which were, in fact, explored by one of H.D.’s circle only a few years before she began work on *Helen in Egypt*. The poet and essayist William Carlos Williams—himself the author of an epic poem, *Paterson* (1946–1958), and writing “during a period of concentrated work on the epic” (Kinnahan 1994: 81)—wrote a brief but important essay in 1946, published in the short-lived *Briarcliff Magazine* and titled “Letter to an Australian Editor.”⁷¹ The focus of the essay is a contrast between two different models of poetic authorship in relation to the tradition. The first is the “classical” model, whereby poets “strike back toward the triumphant forms of the past, father to father. No mother necessary.” This patrilineal and “academic approach” takes the “fixed classic forms” as both their subject and formal structure, and “leaps ages and places” in an “androgynetic”

relationship between past and present. The “direct approach,” on the other hand, avoids the “sterility” of the first patrilineal approach, engaging with the “fertility” of the “forms [which] arise from society... the fecundating men and women about [the poet] who have given him birth”—later called the “supplying female.” “The direct approach,” Williams summarizes, “*is the spectacle of our lives today, raised if possible to the quality of great expression by the invention of poetry.*”

Williams was a college friend of both H.D. and Pound at Bryn Mawr; in a letter to her agent and friend Norman Pearson, H.D. mentions that she was first introduced to Williams through Pound.⁷² Perhaps most interestingly of all for our purposes, however, in a letter dated January 14th 1947, H.D. explicitly writes to Pearson that she has received “a Bryn Mawr edition [of the *Briarcliff Magazine*] on Williams” (Hollenberg 1997: 71)—that is to say, precisely the edition of *Briarcliff Magazine* in which Williams’ “Letter to an Australian Editor” was originally published.⁷³ We are, then, in a rare and fortuitous case, able to ascertain that H.D. did indeed read Williams’ essay on the differences between the patrilineal and matrilineal epic traditions—and it is possible to suggest that H.D.’s *Helen in Egypt* might have been directly responding to Williams’ feminist literary critical theorization.

The most striking instance of the male/female, androgynetic/gynogynetic epic distinction occurs in fact in the passage analyzed above on the proper subject of epic: “it was epic, heroic and it was far / from a basket a child upset / and the spools that rolled to the floor” (p. 289). As Flack has already commented, this is an evocative maternal/feminine image, “using the figures of the abandoned child and maternal care to transform [the] heroic tradition” (Flack 2015: 186).⁷⁴ The epic/heroic/masculine is replaced with the maternal/feminine. But there is also a distinctive meaning to the “spools”—in that weaving is both a markedly female activity, and also,

significantly (and as has often been noted), one associated with the poet in Homer. When Helen first appears in the *Iliad* she is shown weaving a tapestry of the war, as if she herself is creating the events of the poem; heroes are often said to “weave” plots; and the plot of the poem is called a “thread”.⁷⁵ The domestic image of a child upsetting a weaving-basket, as something not fitting for high epic, is thus again, by its paradoxical association with the image of weaving in Homer, transmuted into an argument for women’s—and Helen’s—association with the figure of the poet. A few pages later we have a specific defence and reevaluation of what *female* epic might look like, spoken, with typical indirectness, in the form of an objection: “could a woman ever / know what the heroes felt” (p. 293); “what can a woman know / of man’s passion and birthright?” (p. 294).

The ultimate irony, and redemption, of course, is that *Helen in Egypt* is spoken in the female voice (both of H.D. and Helen), and that the epic experience of Helen’s journey within is framed (largely) through the eyes of a woman. As with *Aurora Leigh*, *Helen in Egypt* becomes metonymic for poetry itself as both the character of the epic and its title.⁷⁶ And this is where the final union—between orality and textuality, scholarship and poetry—is enacted. Helen is described twice in the epic as “the writing”—“she herself is the writing” (pp. 22, 91)⁷⁷—and she is consistently identified with the hieroglyphs which she alone can decode (Achilles calls her a “hieroglyph” on pages 15, 16 and 17). But Helen is also connected to the voice: “*it is an heroic voice, the voice of Helen of Sparta*” (p.176); and, even more suggestively, implying Helen’s identity as the voice: “*again, the ‘voice’ seems to speak for Helen*” (p. 178). Helen becomes the speaking script and the written voice—an emblem for the paradox of a poem that is both oral and written; masculine in genre and tradition, and female in identity and authorship.

In the union of Helen and Achilles and the “birth” of Euphorion, then, we have not only the union of the male and female, and the collapse of the parent/child into the self, but, at the same time, a new maternal lineage for the birth of the text, as we saw was introduced by Barrett Browning and theorized by Williams. At page 217, Paris comments in discussion of the traditional mother–son lineages that “this is the old story, / no new Euphorion.” By assimilating the “story” with “Euphorion,” Helen and Achilles’ child thus also becomes a figure for a new kind of epic “story,” born from the mother. And Helen’s later discussion of Euphorion, in the line following the image of the child upsetting the wool-basket of female epic (p. 289), suggests that Euphorion is visualized along the lines of Williams’ gynogynetic literary creations, springing directly from Helen’s maternal creativity.

In the end, then, H.D. suggests, difference can be reconciled on both a surface and a structural level. On the surface, the differences between Egyptian and Greek, male and female are reconciled; on the structural level, the genres of epic, lyric and drama are brought together; and, most importantly of all, the paradox of an oral and a written text, a male and a female epic, is resolved. The apparent problems of the Homeric text, the questions of authorship, gender, identity; textuality, transmission; memory and structure, are reduced in a “new spirit-order” whereby the epic patrilineage is reversed, and Helen—the female script/female voice—becomes the mother of Achilles and Paris, her own myth, and her own epic text (pp. 217, 289–90). Creative maternity instead becomes a model for a new vision of epic creativity, where voice and script, male bard and female poet come together, “remembered, forgotten, and re-assembled in different order.”

III. Conclusion

Female epic cannot be disassociated from its classical heritage, in its very generic identity *as* epic, and the assumptions of masculinity and classicism that come with it. Even as authors like Barrett Browning and H.D. respond to and refine the epic genre, it is in constant dialogue with classical epic texts, in particular Homer—and, crucially, with the scholarship and literary criticism that surrounded the Homeric texts. Homeric epic does not exist as a mere source of content on which to draw for allusion and intertext, separable from its criticism and tradition, as many scholars including Friedman and Gregory seem to imply.⁷⁸ The Homeric text was never fixed, and its fluidity—both in a tradition of commentary/excision, and in the transition from oral song to written—lies, I argue, at the heart of Barrett Browning’s and H.D.’s re-readings and revisionings of the epic tradition. The instability of Homeric textuality, the history of contested readings and alternative interpretations in classical scholarship from Wolf to Parry, provides a site in which female epicists can remould epic to their own concerns. In that space and openness in the tradition, we see Barrett Browning and H.D. creating a new vision of their identity as authors; positing new models for poetic creation; situating themselves within the canon in often complicated ways that signal both independence and allusion; and drawing on the image of the maternal in order to create a new lineage of creativity, positing the matrilineal as an alternative to the patriarchy of Homer.⁷⁹ In this sense, as Barrett Browning noted of her early response to Homer, female epic can be read as both a “doing over” of Homer—as well as his undoing.

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1. Richard Martin, in his overview of “epic as a genre” in the *Companion to Ancient Epic*, describes the traditional view of epic as “‘cultivated’ writing done by elite males, usually in the service of developing a nation-state” (Martin 2005: 10). Alison Keith goes further, identifying epic in the ancient world as “composed by men, consumed largely by men, and centrally concerned with men. The ancients knew of no female epic poets” (Keith 2000: 1). On gender and genre in ancient epic, see generally Keith (2000: 18), and compare Dentith (2006: 104), who traces the history of epic “as an overwhelmingly male form” to Homer’s *Iliad*. For examples of modern receptions of the masculinity of epic, see e.g. Woolf (1989: 77): “there is no reason to think that the form of the epic ... suit a woman any more than the [masculine] sentence suits her”; Pound (1968: 216): epic is “the speech of a nation through the mouth of one man”; Borges (2000: 49): “the important thing about the epic is a hero—a man who is a pattern for all men.” See further Dentith (2006: 98), Downes (1997: 19) and (2010: 18, 21), Friedman (1986: 203–5), Johns-Putra (2006: 155) and Schweizer (2006: 1). Of course, as Keith points out, one of the most famous exceptions to the assumption of Homer’s male identity was Samuel Butler’s *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (1897), in which he suggested that the *Odyssey* was written by a woman because of the frequency and the sensitivity of the portrayal of female characters. I do not discuss Butler here, in keeping with my focus on female-authored epic and given that he post-dates one of my case studies; but see further Dougher (2001).

2. The study of female epic is still a relatively recent phenomenon, in accordance with its subject’s (and authors’) historic marginalization: see Downes (1997) and (2010), Friedman (1986), Johns-Putra (2001) and Schweizer (2006).

3. On the intersection between gender and genre in women’s writing in English, and the history of scholarship in gender/genre studies, see Stone (1987: 101–2 and 101 n.1). For gender and genre in *Aurora Leigh*, see n.9 below.

4. My choice of texts is a conscious “revisioning” of Susan Stanford Friedman’s path-breaking article on genre and gender in female epic, and thus as much a nod to *scholarship* on female epic as to female epic itself. (It is also, of course, at the same time, in recognition of the seminal importance of these two texts in the tradition of female epic.) *Aurora Leigh* is generally acknowledged as the first major female verse epic in the English literary tradition: see Friedman (1986: 207). Downes (2010: ch. 3) identifies possible precursors to Barrett Browning, although many are doubtful as Downes is, as he himself admits (p.28), very free in his classification of epic: can we, for example, really

see Proba's Virgilian *cento* as an epic in its own right (p.39)? A notable (possible) exception is Mary Tighe's *Psyche, or the Legend of Love* (1805), which can be seen as "one of the earliest attempts in English to write a female epic" Chakravarti (2006: 99)—but, as Chakravarti notes, Tighe's *Psyche* did not earn its place in the literary canon. It is therefore not treated here, as not having influenced the development of female epic as a genre to the same extent as Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*. For a list of examples of female epic, see the Appendix to Downes (2010) and the chapters in Schweizer (2006).

5. The generic hybridity of female epic, between the genres of epic, lyric, and the novel in particular, has often been noted: see most notably Friedman (1986) and Schweizer (2006: 14), and also Bailey (2006: 120), Dentith (2006: 94–97), Downes (2010: 30–31), and Stone (1987). On the formal flexibility of female epic (that is, the variability between prose and verse), see Schweizer (2006: 11–12), Swedenberg (1944: 155). On the hybridization of epic as a genre generally in the Victorian period, see also Isobel Hurst's chapter in this volume, page with "Classically-educated poets often chose to approach the epic tradition obliquely and in hybrid or fragmentary forms" [footnote]. For the history of female epic, see Downes (2010: ch. 3) and Schweizer (2006: 12–13), though note that Downes' definition of what constitutes female epic is somewhat looser than my own.

6. See Friedman (1986: 203) on the "anxiety of poetic genre" among female epic poets, responding to Gilbert and Gubar (1979) on female authors' "anxiety of authorship"; on the "anxiety of influence," see Bloom (1997), and in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's writing, see Stone (1995: 55).

7. The quotation is from *Aurora Leigh* 5.1258; the text of *Aurora Leigh* used throughout is the 1993 Oxford World's Classics edition by Kerry McSweeney (Barrett Browning 1993).

8. Barrett Browning's self-definition of *Aurora Leigh* as an epic in several instances throughout the poem is central to my reading: most famous is the passage in book 5.213–216, "Never flinch, / But still, unscrupulously epic, catch, / Upon the burning lava of a song / The full-veined, heaving, double-breasted Age..."). As already mentioned, however, and as Friedman (1986) shows, *Aurora Leigh*'s generic intertexts also include the novel (amongst other genres, including lyric and mock-epic); I will focus here on Barrett Browning's use of Homer, in particular, in order to bolster the epic credentials of her work. On *Aurora Leigh* as epic, see, among others, Bailey (2006: 117–18), Dentith (2006: 94–97), Hurst (2006: ch. 3, esp. 114 and 124–25), Laird (1999: 365), Mermin (1989: 183), Stone (1987: 125–26), Tucker (2008: 377). For the generic hybridity of female epic generally, see above, n.5. On the

generic hybridity of *Aurora Leigh* in particular, see Bailey (2006: 120), Dentith (2006: 95) (*Aurora Leigh* as a “generic combinatory”), Downes (1997: 216), Downes (2010: 276–89), Friedman (1986), Hurst (2006: 101, 122, 126–27), Stone (1987: 103–4, 115, 125–27).

9. On the “dialectic ... between scholarly criticism of Homeric epic and contemporary literature’s imaginative, affective, and ludic responses to and representations of reading ancient Greek poetry” see Bridges (2008: 166). See Bridges (2008) throughout for the relationship between Victorian literature and Homeric epic; see also, on Homer and the Victorian period generally, Harrison (2013), and on Homer/Hellenism and women writers, see Hurst (2006) and Fiske (2008). For a survey of the interrelationships between women and scholarship/criticism in the nineteenth century, see Laurence, Bellamy, and Perry (2000). On the interaction between gender and genre in *Aurora Leigh*, see Byrd (1999), Friedman (1986), Hurst (2006: 108–113), Stone (1987: 115–127).

10. See also Friedman (1986: 208 and 225 n.21), Gilbert (1984: 195), Gilbert and Gubar (1979: 575), Stone (1987: 115), Stone (1995: 136–7).

11. See Friedman (1986: 208): “*Aurora Leigh* ... is also an intensely personal account of a woman writer’s inner conflicts... Private lyric provided a safe workshop in which [Barrett Browning] forged the self later projected into *Aurora*.” See also Dentith (2006: 84): “there seems little invitation in the poem to distinguish [Aurora’s] opinion from that of the ‘E.B.B.’ who appended her signature to the Dedication, informing her cousin John Kenyon, and the world at large, that this was the poem ‘into which my highest convictions upon Life and Art have entered.’ ” See also Falk (1991), Hurst (2006: 109), Showalter (1982) (“*Aurora Leigh*... is one of the few autobiographical discussions of feminine role conflict,” p.22–3), Stone (1987: 124) and Stone (1995: 136).

12. See Dentith (2006: 3) on nineteenth-century writers more generally and their “consciousness of the antiquity of epic as a genre.”

13. On Barrett Browning and her (fraught) relationship with her classical models, see Hurst (2006: ch. 3), and especially pp. 116–18 on Barrett Browning’s *Battle of Marathon*; on which see also Downes (2010: 153), Friedman (1986: 207). On Pope’s Homer, see Canevaro’s chapter in this volume.

14. On Barrett Browning’s classical background, see Hurst (2006: 104–8), Mermin (1989: 19–21), Stone (1995: 19–20) and J. Wallace (2000); see also Drummond (2006), Hardwick (2000: 32) and Prins (2017: 59–115) on Barrett Browning’s translations of *Prometheus Bound*. For an exploration of classical intertexts in Barrett Browning’s

works, see Hurst (2015); and on women's classical education in the nineteenth century, see Fiske (2008: 1–23) and Hurst (2006: 52–100). For Victorian women's translations of Greek tragedy, see Prins (2017).

15. Hurst (2006: 111) also makes this point, and adds the connection of the image of the blind poet to Milton.

16. *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 172–3: τυφλὸς ἀνὴρ, οἰκεῖ δὲ Χίῳ ἔνι παιπαλοέεσση τοῦ μᾶσαι μετόπισθεν ἀριστεύουσιν ᾠοδαί (“He is a blind man, and dwells in rocky Chios: his lays are evermore supreme” [tr. Hugh Evelyn-White]). Note that Robert Browning, in his 1889 poem “Development,” terms Homer the “Blind Old Man, / Sweetest of Singers”—on which see Bridges (2008: 167–73).

17. Contrast Hurst (2006: ch. 3), who suggests that Barrett Browning turns from philology to poetry to re-approach female epic (though see page 105, where Hurst comments that “the poem offers an insight into what a woman with poetic ambitions might feel about her relationship to the masculine literary tradition”); for perspectives on Barrett Browning as a (classical) scholar, see Hurst (2006: 101) and J. Wallace (2000), especially 329 on Barrett Browning as “the most scholarly woman poet of the nineteenth century;” see further n.14 above. On Victorian women writers and the classical world more generally, see Comet (2013), Fiske (2008) and Hurst (2006).

18. The text here is Barrett Browning (1993), although it is interesting to note that in the Harvard manuscript (MS Lowell 5) Barrett Browning spells Wolf's name correctly (i.e. without the reduplication of the “f”) throughout. On this passage, see Downes (1997: 230–1); see also Bridges (2008: 181 n.6), Dentith (2006: 98–102), Tucker (2008: 381 n.59), Stone (1995: 156–7), J. Wallace (2000: 347–8). Contrast Barrett Browning's rejection of Wolf with that of her husband Robert Browning in “Development” (1899); see Bridges (2008: 167–73).

19. Dentith (2006: 98) writes that Aurora rejects “Wolf's splendid edition of Homer;” Downes (1997: 231) suggests that she sells Homer in order to “finance her epic status.”

20. See, among the vast literature on the subject, Fowler (2005), Graziosi (2002), and Nagy (1996). On the influence of Wolf and debates around the identity of Homer, see Dentith (2006: 4–10); and see further the chapters by Canevaro and Hurst in this volume.

21. For text and commentary on Wolf's *Prolegomena*, see Grafton, Most & Zetzel (1985). For further reading, see the “Bibliographical Essays” at the back of Grafton, Most & Zetzel (1985: 249–54); see in particular Grafton (1981), Pattison (1889), Volkmann (1874). On Wolf's background, see Grafton, Most & Zetzel (1985: 3–4); for his scholarship and scholarly influences, see Grafton (1981).

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22. On Pisistratus, see the *Prolegomena to Homer* chapters 7, 33 (Grafton, Most & Zetzel 1985: 57, 137); on Villoison, see Grafton, Most & Zetzel (1985: 7 and 8 n.15)
23. Given in Grafton, Most & Zetzel (1985: 5), citing the *Prolegomena to Homer* chs. 18, 33.
24. Compare Grafton (1981: 109); on the impact of the *Prolegomena*, see Grafton (1981: 110–19), Jenkyns (1989: 22, 207–8).
25. On Wolf’s reception in England in the nineteenth century, see also Dentith (2006: 18–23), Fiske (2008: 65, 71–5).
26. Bailey (2006: 122), Stone (1995: 145).
27. On the early history of the Elzevirs (also spelled Elseviers), see Davies (1954), Willems (1880) (the standard nineteenth-century account). For the 1656 Homeric edition, see Willems (1880: 307–8 [no. 1202]).
28. Schrevel’s 1656 Elzevir edition was titled in both Greek and Latin (given at Willems 1880: 307): Ὀμήρου Ἰλιάς καὶ Ὀδυσσεΐα, καὶ εἰς αὐτὰς σχόλια, ἢ ἐξηγήσεις Διδύμου. *Homeri Ilias et Odyssea, et in easdem scholia sive interpretatio Didymi. Cum latina versione accuratissima, indiceque graeco locupletissimo rerum ac variantium lectionum*. *Accurante Corn. Schrevelio* (“The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer, and the accompanying scholia (or commentary) of Didymus. [Repeated in Latin.] With a most accurate Latin version, and a detailed Greek index of objects and varying readings. Edited by Cornelius Schrevel.”) Note that all translations given are my own, unless otherwise indicated.
29. See Dickey (2007: 18–21).
30. Houston (2013: 6, 73–97), Mermin (1989: 70, 128), Stone (1995: 145–9, 153–4).
31. See also Comet (2013: 115).
32. See also Grafton (1981: 120–6), and Barrett Browning (1993: 351 *ad* 5.1246–57). **Cross reference to Hurst chapter w/ section about German biblical scholarship coinciding with Homeric scholarship [footnote].**
33. It is interesting to note that the Elzevir New Testaments were particularly important as the origin of the term *textus receptus* (“received text,” or the succession of printed versions of the Greek New Testament, originating with Erasmus’ 1516 edition) in the reception history of the New Testament, thus also implicating them in the biblical textual tradition: see Jarrott (1970: 121 n.14).
34. The bibliography on this topic is vast. See, in particular, Halliwell (2002) on Plato’s theory of *mimesis* (“imitation”); see also Asmis (1992) and Murray (1996).

35. For text and notes, see Lamberton (2012).

36. On Proclus' defence of Homer, see Lamberton (2012: xxvi–xxx), and see further Sheppard (1980).

37. Barrett Browning (1899: 381); see also Barrett Browning (1899: 125) on “Homer’s supremacy.”

38. For Barrett Browning’s own classical education with her brother in comparison to Aurora’s education by her father, and on Barrett Browning’s association of “Greek grammar with male scholars,” see Hurst (2006: 106–7); see also Stone (1987: 117) and J. Wallace (2000: 338–9, 345): “the classical tradition, symbolised by [Aurora’s] father’s library, represents an unavoidable, material weight which must be negotiated, exploited and transformed.” On literary transmission/tradition as patrilineal, see further [\[cross-reference within chapter, footnote\]](#).

39. Presaging Hélène Cixous’ image of women’s writing “in white ink” (Cixous 1976: 881) (as Marjorie Stone notes, Stone 1995: 158). On the prevalent imagery of breasts and maternity in *Aurora Leigh*, see Dentith (2006: 99), Gilbert (1984: 203), Stone (1995: 157–58), and compare the passage at *AL* 5.214–22 (cited at n.21 above). Note also Bailey (2006: 135 and 137 n.9), who suggests that the nine books of *Aurora Leigh* can be compared to the nine month gestation period for humans, suggesting another birth/creation metaphor represented by the text as a whole.

40. Compare Dentith (2006: 102): “Wolf’s treachery is to refuse to recognise that there is a legitimate line of maternal succession from Homer to his baby-gods: again the transmission of the heroic is refigured in unembarrassedly feminine terms.”

41. Perhaps the most famous instance of Barrett Browning’s instantiation of a female literary tradition is in an 1845 letter she wrote to the literary critic Henry Chorley in a discussion of the paucity of “poetesses” in the past: “The divine breath... why did it never pass, even in the lyrical form, over the lips of a woman? ... I look everywhere for grandmothers and see none. It is not in the filial spirit I am deficient, I do assure you—witness my reverent love of the grandfathers!” (Barrett Browning 1899: 232). For a feminist reading of Barrett Browning’s work, see, among others, Byrd (1999), Friedman (1986), Mermin (1989: 183–224), Stone (1987), Stone (1995: 172–6).

42. The major critical works of scholarship on H.D., her life and work include Collecott (1999), DuPlessis (1986), Friedman (1975), Friedman (1981), Friedman (1990b), Gregory (1997) and Guest (1984); and see also the collected essays in Bloom (1989), Christodoulides and Mackay (2011) and Friedman and DuPlessis (1990). For H.D.’s relationship with Pound, see Korg (2003) and Flack (2015: 188–95).

43. Major works of scholarship on *Helen in Egypt* include Barbour (2012), Flack (2015: 177–88), Friedman (1986), Gelpi (1989), Gregory (1995), Gregory (1997), Hart (1995), Hokanson (1992), Murnaghan (2009).

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44. For a comprehensive list of classical allusions/intertextuality in H.D.'s poems, see the Appendix to Gregory (1997: 233–58); see further Flack (2015: 171–7).
45. On the prose captions, see Barbour (2012).
46. See also Flack (2015: 177), Friedman (1990b: 302–3), Barbour (2012: 483).
47. For instances of H.D.'s reception of Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* in *Helen in Egypt*, see Downes (2010: 187)—“certain details of *Helen in Egypt*... appear to ‘think back’ to *Aurora Leigh*”—and Friedman (1986).
48. Parry's essays were published in French in the 1920's and 1930's, and collected and published posthumously in English translation by his son, Adam Parry, in 1971.
49. All references to the text are to the 1961 New Directions edition, with introduction by Horace Gregory.
50. On this aspect of *Helen in Egypt* see especially Gregory (1997: 218–31), and also DuPlessis (1986: 111–12). On the figure of Helen in classical literature generally, see Austin (1994), Blondell (2010), Gumpert (2001: 3–100); and on Stesichorus' *Palinode*, see Austin (1994: 90–117), Beecroft (2006), Nagy (1990: 419–23).
51. Compare also Barbour (2012: 472), Gregory (1997: 281–332), and Flack (2015: 172 and n.23). Note that, as Friedman (1995) describes, H.D.'s 1924 poem “Helen” was originally drafted on the back cover of Theodore Buckley's 1875 translation of *The Tragedies of Euripides*, suggesting her close connection both to Euripides and to the Greek literary tradition at large.
52. On the importance of Homer for modernism, and the usefulness of Homer in defining/identifying modernist poetry, see Flack (2015). H.D.'s reworking of Homer here also, of course, ties into other modernist reworkings of Homer, as in, for example, Joyce's *Ulysses* (on which see Zajko 2005) and Pound's *Cantos*, on which see Flack (2015: 25–58). See further n.61 below.
53. Note that Gregory also suggests a Homeric intertext for H.D.'s work, (Gregory 1997: 173–4). Compare also the Appendix to Gregory (1997), where the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* are given as sources for H.D.'s poems, but only in terms of content.
54. The generic hybridity of H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* between epic and lyric has already been noted by Friedman (1986). See also Flack (2015: 164), and on the generic multiplicity of female epic generally, see n.5 above. For a reading of H.D. with attention to the question of orality/phonetics, see Morris (2003: 19–55); Barbour (2012: 466) suggests that *Helen in Egypt* can be read as a fusion of “poetry and prose as well as oral and textual consciousness,” but does not make the link to the oral/textual debate in Homeric studies. On the orality versus the textuality of

Homer, see Lord (2000) and Nagy (1996); on poetry vs. prose in H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, see Barbour (2012: 486), Hokanson (1992: 332–4).

55. Compare Gregory (1997: 1), “no other modern writer is more persistently engaged in classical literary exchange.” For an introduction to H.D.'s classical education, see DuPlessis (1986: 17) and E. M. Wallace (1987).

56. See further Gregory (1997: 279 n.47). In her earlier article, Gregory states that “there is no evidence that H.D. re-read Homer after about 1920” (Gregory 1995: 85), but in notes on an unnumbered page of H.D.'s working notebooks for *Helen in Egypt*, in which she keeps notes on Graves' *Greek Myths* (Gregory 1995: 109), it is clear that H.D. is at least rehearsing the Iliadic story as re-told by Graves, with the names of Apollo, Chryseis and so on occurring here.

57. See the Appendix to Gregory (1997: 238). On H.D.'s knowledge of Greek, see Flack (2015: 9) and Gregory (1997: 54–6); and on her translations from Greek, see Flack (2015: 10, 165, 168). On H.D.'s & Pound's translations, see Babcock (1995); see also Gregory (1995: 85–6) on her early attempt at a translation of Euripides' *Helen*.

58. Flack (2015: 11) (on J.A.K. Thomson), Gregory (1997: 73) (on Wilamowitz) and chs. 3 and 4 (on Walter Pater and Jane Harrison), Gregory (1995: 85 n.5) (on Verrall and Murray).

59. The only scholar I can find to directly connect Parry and H.D. is Morris (2003: 48), but she does not suggest a direct influence or delve into its potential implications.

60. See Korg (2003) and n.63 above.

61. On Pound's knowledge of Parry see Flack (2015: 39). Note that H.D. calls *Helen in Egypt* her “cantos” in her letters to Pearson (Hollenberg 1997) and compares the epic directly to Pound's *Cantos* (on which see Flack 2015: 178 n.36), “suggesting that she saw her work as parallel and responsive to Pound's epic.”

62. On memory in *Helen in Egypt*, see Hart (1995), and in H.D.'s poetry generally, see Baccolini (2003); on the interrelationship between memory and H.D.'s interest in psychoanalysis see Friedman (1981: 59–67); on the poem's antitheses, see n.54 above.

63. See Gregory (1995) and Gregory (1997: 218–31) on intertextuality with Euripides, and see also n.51 above. On the generic flexibility of *Helen in Egypt*, see n.54 above.

64. ὥς καὶ ὀπίσσω ἀνθρώποισι πελώμεθ' ἀοίδιμοι ἔσσομένοισι, Hom. *Il.* 6.357–8.

65. For an alternative interpretation, see Barbour (2012), who focuses on the oral/textual, poetry/prose opposition.

66. φύλλα τὰ μὲν τ' ἄνεμος χαμάδις χέει, Hom. *Il.* 6.147. It is interesting to note that φύλλον can mean leaf or petal in Greek, suggesting H.D.'s "flower-leaves;" see LSJ s.v. φύλλον.

67. *basia mille, deinde centum; / dein mille altera, dein secunda centum*, Catull. 5.7–8; *soles occidere et redire possunt; / nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux, / nox est perpetua una dormienda*, 4–6; *conturbabimus illa, ne sciamus / ... tantum esse basiorum*, 10–12.

68. See Downes (2010: 214) for a discussion.

69. On H.D. and Freud, see Chisholm (1992), Friedman (1981: 17–49), Friedman (1987), and Friedman (2005); for a psychoanalytic reading of *Helen in Egypt*, see Edmunds (1994: 95–148).

70. See further Hollenberg (1991: 175–204) on the theme of motherhood in *Helen in Egypt*.

71. For an introduction to Williams' "Letter," see Schmidt (1991), and see the discussion at Kinnahan (1994: 81–2); for the text (a 1991 reprint of the 1946 original), see Williams (1991).

72. Hollenberg (1997: 12 n.14) on Williams as a college friend of H.D. and Pound, and Hollenberg (1997: 86) for the letter to Pearson in which H.D. says that she was introduced to Williams through Pound.

73. See Schmidt (1991: 4) and Hollenberg (1997: 111 nn. 15–16).

74. On *Helen in Egypt* as a feminizing epic and Helen's "conflict with patriarchy" see Friedman (1986); see also Friedman (1975), Friedman (1981: 253–72) and Friedman (1990a) on H.D.'s creation of a "women's mythology" and her resurrection of "matriarchal values" (375), and Hollenberg (1991) on creativity and maternal/childbirth metaphors in H.D.'s corpus, in particular 3–30. On motherhood as a theme in *Helen in Egypt*, see Gelpi (1989).

75. On the long-noted connection between weaving and poetry in Homer, see Bergren (1983: 79), Blondell (2010: 19), Pantelia (1993: 494), and Worman (2001: 30 and n.37) for additional bibliography.

76. See Flack (2015: 180).

77. See Barbour (2012: 16–17).

78. As, for example, in the Appendix to Gregory (1997: 254–5); see also **n.53 above**.

79. I noted above Barrett Browning's famous comment, "I look everywhere for grandmothers and see none" (Barrett Browning 1899: 232). Later, in *A Room of One's Own* (1928), Virginia Woolf would make a similar remark: female novelists "had no tradition behind them, or one so short and partial that it was of little help. For we think back through our mothers if we are women" (Woolf 1989: 64). Friedman notes that H.D. alludes to reading Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (Friedman 1990b: 389 n.22).